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FORCE WORKS®

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MANTIS! KANG! ...THE HANDS BEHIND THE PUPPET!

ABNETT
LANNING
OLIVEIRA
MICHELETTI

SOMETHING DEEP INSIDE HIM IS SCREAMING.

HE GAZES AT HIS IRON-CLAD HAND, DISCHARGING VAPOR COILS FROM THE REPULSOR MUZZLE IN HIS PALM.

MOMENTS AGO, IN ANOTHER NOW, HE BURNED AWAY THE LIFE OF JANET VAN DYNE.*

ANTHONY STARK TREMBLES INSIDE THE ARMOR THAT HAS MADE HIM FAMOUS.

FOR THE FIRST TIME, HE REALIZES WITHOUT DOUBT THAT HE IS EVERYTHING HIS NIGHTMARES SAID HE WAS.

OUT OF TIME MIND

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*SEE AVENGERS #393 FOR THE ASTONISHING ACTION.-- NEL

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SHAKING, HE RAISES HIS EYES...

...STUDYING THE TOWERING OTHERPLACE CITADEL THAT THE TEMPORTAL HAS CARRIED HIM TO...

...HIM, AND HIS ESCORTS. THE PAIR OF SIBLING WARRIORS, TWINS PERHAPS, AND THE GIRL...

...THE GIRL WHO IS AFRAID TO LOOK AT HIM.

SO, HE IS HERE...

KANG!

MANTIS!

WELL, ANTHONY?

WE SNATCHED HIM FROM THE CLAWS OF THE AVENGERS, LORD KANG. THEY WERE AFTER HIS BLOOD.

HIS USEFULNESS AS A SPY IS OVER.

Pah! IF YOU HADN'T BEEN SO KEEN TO USE HIM AS AN INSTRUMENT OF VENGEANCE, MANTIS, ANTHONY'S COVER WOULD STILL BE INTACT.

WHAT DOES IT MATTER?

THE HOUR FOR SUBTERFUGE IS LONG PAST.

THEY KNOW. THE AVENGERS KNOW.

I HAD TO FIGHT THEM... HAD TO...

EVENTS HAVE INDEED OVERTAKEN US. BEYOND THIS MOMENT, THE TIME STREAM IS ENTIRELY HIS.

OUR ENEMY IS AT THE GATES. WE MUST ACT NOW.

THIS IS... SUDDEN. YOU SAID WE WOULD HAVE YEARS BEFORE...

I'LL NEED A TEMPORAL BACK TO WORKS, VENTURA.

AND DON'T WORRY, KANG--

NO LONGER YEARS! WE HAVE DAYS! THE TEMPORAL BEACHHEAD MUST BE SECURED-- NOW!!

THAT IS WHY I SENT FOR YOU. YOU MUST RETURN AND BEGIN THE FINAL WORK.

REMEMBER, ANTHONY, IT WAS YOUR STRENGTH THAT MADE ME SELECT YOU ALL THOSE YEARS AGO.

"...I'LL PLAY MY PART IN THIS TO THE END."

FORCE WORKS HQ, VENTURA, IS A SELF-MAINTAINING "SMART" BUILDING.

HYPER-INTELLIGENT ELECTRONICS, THE PINNACLE OF ANTHONY STARK'S CREATIVE GENIUS, REGULATE THE BUILDING'S SYSTEMS, ITS CLIMATE, ITS SECURITY.

IT IS A SELF-SUFFICENT ISLAND OF ARTIFICIAL LIFE...

LOCKED ALONE, WITHIN IT COWERS A SINGLE, FRIGHTENED CHILD.

A PERSISTENT ELECTRONIC TONE DRAWS RACHEL CARPENTER TO THE COMMUNICATIONS SUITE...

THE SILENCE OVERWHELMS HER.

FOR WEEKS, SHE HAS BELIEVED THE BUILDING TO BE HAUNTED.

EMERG COMUN

SOURCE: AVENGER

PLATO? THIS LOOKS REAL IMPORTANT. IT'S FROM THE AVENGERS...

PLEASE RESP

...WE SHOULD TELL AMANDA OR SUZI ABOUT IT. DO YOU KNOW WHERE THEY ARE, PLATO?

PLATO?

NOW SHE FEELS THE SILENT GHOSTS CLOSING IN AROUND HER...

FAR BELOW, IN THE SUB-BASEMENT OF THE WORKS...

...AMANDA CHANEY PROBES THE TERRIBLE SECRETS OF THE COMPUTER SYSTEM SHE HAS DISCOVERED THERE...

...YOU'RE SAYING YOUR PRIMARY COMPONENTS WERE MANUFACTURED IN THE FUTURE?

correct.

BUT THAT'S JUST NOT POSSIBLE!

IT'S ALL TOO POSSIBLE, AMANDA.

I'M SURPRISED TO FIND YOU DOWN HERE. SURPRISED AND DISAPPOINTED.

STARK! WHAT IN GOD'S NAME IS THIS PL--

OWW! LET ME GO!

NO! I CAN'T AFFORD TO! YOU'VE SEEN TOO MUCH! WHY DID YOU HAVE TO COME DOWN HERE AMANDA?!

NO!

COME BACK HERE!

TLK

AGH!

COME BACK!

Thank God--!

BUT WHERE AM I ??

FREEZER UNITS...?

WHAT COULD HE WANT WITH...

...NO! NOOOO!! SUZI ENDO!

HE'S LASERED THE LOCK!

FTTSHH

OPEN CHANNEL! EMERGENCY! PLEASE RESPOND! THIS IS CHANEY! I'M IN THE SUB-BASEMENT!

PLEASE! SOMEONE... ANYONE!!

HONEY! LISTEN TO ME! GET HELP! GET THE AVENGERS! GET ANYBODY! IT'S STARK! HE'S TRYING TO--

THIS IS RACHEL. WHAT'S WRONG?

ECHOH

MS. CHANEY...

...YOU'RE FIRED!

WFFRAAKKK

GOD HELP ME IF IT ISN'T GETTING EASIER EACH TIME...

AMANDA? WHAT WAS THAT NOISE? WHERE ARE YOU?

VIRGIL! COMMENCE CHRONOGRAPHY PROTOCOL SIEGE PERILOUS. AUTHORIZATION STARK ALPHA BEDEVERE.

authorization recognized. the siege perilous protocol is now active.

commencing tachyon grid power up. chronographic array engaged.

establishing systems link with starcore satellite.

GOOD...

... KEEP ME INFORMED, I'LL BE BACK SHORTLY.

I HAVE SOMETHING I MUST ATTEND TO.

AMANDA? AMANDA??

A HUNDRED MILES AWAY, A SPEEDING WORKS WAGON CUTS THROUGH THE NIGHT ON A BARREN HIGHWAY...

...THIS HAD BETTER BE GOOD, HAWKEYE...

...THE WAY YOU RAN OUT ON US AT MESA VIENTO*--

BEFORE YOU CHEW ME OUT, HEAR ME OUT, TASHA!

*SEE WAR MACHINE #21.--NEL

...I'M CALLING FROM JANET VAN DYNE'S PLACE OUT IN SOUTH-HAMPTON...

THERE'S NO EASY WAY TO TELL YOU THIS. I BROUGHT STARK TO NEW YORK TO STRAIGHTEN THINGS OUT WITH THE AVENGERS.

GUESS WHAT? IT WAS HIM ALL THE TIME. STARK IS THE KILLER! HE FREAKED ON US AND BUGGED OUT! IN THE PROCESS, HE HURT JAN--BAD.*

*SEE THE MILESTONES, IRON MAN #323 AND AVENGERS #393.--NEL

OH, MAN... NO!

HOW IS SHE, CLINT?

SHE TOOK A REPULSOR HIT--FULL FORCE! HANK'S DOING WHAT HE CAN...

WE GOTTA FIND THAT S.O.B.--

--BEFORE HE HURTS ANY MORE OF US.

WHERE ARE YOU GUYS, JIM?

HEADING OUT OF THE DESERT IN THE WORKS WAGON WE SALVAGED FROM THE HEX SHIP THAT **DEATHUNT** TRASHED.

I'LL GO AHEAD AND CHECK AT **THE WORKS.** I CAN MAKE GOOD TIME. AGENT AND THE WIDOW CAN FOLLOW BY ROAD.

OKAY, WE'LL SCOPE AVENGERS MANSION AND GET BACK TO YOU.

KEEP US INFORMED. AND IF YOU FIND HIM--

I CAN'T TAKE THIS IN...

I HEAR THAT.

I'LL MEET YOU AT THE WORKS. **GOOD LUCK,** GUYS...

...WE'RE GONNA **NEED** IT!

BELIEVE IT, 'TASH. STARK'S PLAYED US ALL FOR FOOLS, JUST LIKE WE SUSPECTED.

HE'S GONNA **PAY.**

--DON'T TAKE HIM ON **ALONE.**

HAWKEYE OUT.

VIETNAM...

...THE TEMPLE OF AGAPHAUR...

...TWO PLACES THAT DON'T EXIST ANYMORE.

YOU CLAIM TO BE GUSTAV BRANDT. THAT NAME MEANS ONLY ONE THING TO ME... THE ZODIAC VILLAIN LIBRA, FATHER OF MANTIS!

A MOMENT WHILE I GATHER MY THOUGHTS, WANDA. MY MIND IS STILL READJUSTING TO ITS NEW IDENTITY.

YOU'VE FINISHED OUR ANACHRONAUT ADVERSARIES IN QUICK MEASURE, SLADE...

...NOW HOW ABOUT YOU PROVIDE AN EXPLANATION WITH EQUAL SPEED?

...BUT IN ALL HONESTY, I AM GUSTAV BRANDT.

I CAN UNDERSTAND YOUR WARINESS. I WANT TO EXPLAIN THIS.

HOW COULD YOU BETRAY ME, SLADE?!? I LOVED YOU! I--

JULIA! NO!

GO FIND FISHER. MAKE SURE HE'S ALL RIGHT.

WANDA--

GO. I'LL HANDLE THIS.

FROM THE TOP NOW, "GUSTAV"...

...OH, SLADE...

GUSTAV BRANDT IS *DEAD*. HISTORY IS QUITE CLEAR ABOUT THAT.

HISTORY DOES *NOT* LIE, WANDA.

SO WHO *IS* LYING HERE?

TIME... AND SPACE BOTH HAVE BEEN SUBORNED TO *BEND* THE TRUTH...

...AS THE FATHER OF *MANTIS*, THE *CELESTIAL MADONNA*, GUSTAV BRANDT WAS REVERED BY THE *PRIESTS OF PAMA* WHO RESIDED HERE AT AGAPHAUR. WHEN HE DIED... WHEN *I* DIED... THE PRIESTS *SALVAGED* BRANDT'S SPIRIT AND BECAME ITS CUSTODIAN.

HOWEVER, DISILLUSIONED WITH HER COSMIC ROLE, MANTIS CHOSE TO ABANDON THE PRIESTS AND JOIN WITH THE TIME CONQEROR, *KANG*, AS HIS CONSORT. THE PRIESTS THEN KNEW THAT ONE DAY, KANG WOULD SEEK TO ERADICATE ALL TRACE OF THEM, THE COTATI, AND THE REST OF HER CHECKERED PAST.

AND THIS DESTRUCTION IS HIS HANDI-WORK?

KANG HAS USED HIS FORMIDABLE *CHRONOLOGICAL POWERS* TO EXPUNGE THE COUNTRY OF VIETNAM SO THOROUGHLY FROM THE TIME STREAM THAT *EVERYONE* INCLUDING *YOU*, WANDA, HAS FORGOTTEN IT EVER EXISTED.

AND *THAT* WAS WHY I WAS CREATED.

AS A *WARNING*, I AM ONE OF THE DESPERATE *MAYDAYS* THE PRIESTS COULD RISK SENDING TO WARN YOU ABOUT *KANG*.

WITH THEIR UNEARTHLY POWERS, THE PRIESTS TOOK MY SALVAGED SPIRIT--MY *SOUL*, IF YOU WILL--AND GRAFTED IT INTO *ANOTHER* BODY, IN A TIME-LINE RUNNING *PARALLEL* TO THIS ONE.

THE ESSENCE OF GUSTAV BRANDT WAS TRANSPLANTED INTO *SLADE TRUMAN* WHO, IN A DIFFERENT REALITY, WAS *MOONRAKER*, A TRUSTED MEMBER OF FORCE WORKS.

TO PROTECT IT FROM KANG'S EMISSARIES, THE TRANSPLANTED SOUL WAS HIDDEN SO DEEPLY EVEN *I* DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT IT.

AT AN APPROPRIATE MOMENT, I WAS SHIFTED INTO THIS TIME STREAM, SO THAT NO ONE WOULD EVER REALIZE I WAS AN *ALIEN* TO THIS WORLD.

YOU'VE BROKEN JULIA'S HEART.

I NEVER MEANT TO. IN *MY* REALITY, SPIDER-WOMAN AND MOONRAKER ARE LOVERS. THE MOMENT I STEPPED INTO THIS WORLD, THAT BECAME *FACT* HERE, TOO.

THE LIFE AND MEMORIES THAT JULIA AND I SHARE ARE THOSE THAT *FOLLOWED* ME ACROSS TIME. OUR LOVE IS NOT *FALSE*. IT IS SIMPLY... *MISPLACED*.

ASSUMING I *BUY* ANY OF THAT... WHAT ABOUT THIS PLACE?! IF THIS IS *VIETNAM*, THEN IT IS DEAD AND WIPED FROM THE TIMELINE.

SURELY YOUR *WARNING* HAS COME TOO LATE?

THE PRIESTS' PROTECTIVE MEASURES WERE SUCH THAT GUSTAV BRANDT COULD ONLY *TRULY* RE-AWAKEN WHEN BROUGHT INTO CLOSE CONTACT WITH AGAPHAUR.

AND THIS *DESTRUCTION* IS MERELY THE START...

...KANG PLANS THIS FOR THE *ENTIRE PLANET*. HE INTENDS TO RESHAPE IT *ALL* WITH HIS CHRONOGRAPHIC POWERS. AND THAT IS THE *TRUE* HORROR I WAS SENT TO WARN ABOUT.

OKAY...

...THE ANACHRONAUTS YOU KILLED PROVE KANG'S INVOLVEMENT. BUT WHAT'S THE PURPOSE? WHAT DOES KANG HOPE TO *GAIN* BY THIS?

I THINK HE'S *SCARED* OF SOMETHING.

ALL I TRULY KNOW IS... HE MUST BE *STOPPED*.

HEEYYY!

WHAT WAS *THAT*?

FROM OUTSIDE...

FISHER?

A HAND, POR FAVOR.

I FOUND OUR FRIEND HERE IN THE THICKETS OVER YONDER. THE BAD GUYS HAD HIM CHAINED UP AND GUARDED.

A WINGED MAN! SOME KIND OF MUTANT...?!

THAT'S THE REAL TRICK HERE, WANDA. HE DIDN'T HAVE THE WINGS WHEN I FIRST SAW HIM...

...BUT WHILE I WAS TANGLING WITH HIS CAPTORS, HE JUST... CHANGED! ONE MOMENT HE WAS A NORMAL TEENAGER, THE NEXT... THIS!

YOU SAID "MUTANT" AND THAT'S PARTLY RIGHT. THIS BOY HAS BEEN HYPER-EVOLVED. IT'S ONE OF THE MORE INHUMAN PARTS OF KANG'S PLAN.

THE CHRONOGRAPHIC EFFECT DESTROYS OR TRANSMUTES VIRTUALLY EVERYTHING AND EVERYONE IT TOUCHES. BUT A TINY PERCENTAGE OF HUMANS -- THOSE WHO ARE METABOLICALLY SUITED -- ARE TRANSFORMED INTO POWERFUL UNIQUE BEINGS SUCH AS THIS.

KANG THEN RECRUITS THEM FOR GROWING HIS ANACHRONAUT ARMY.

WHO'S KANG? I MISSED STUFF, DIDN'T I?

KANG'S AN OLD ADVERSARY, FISHER. OUR PRIORITY HAS SUDDENLY BECOME GETTING OUT OF HERE!

I THINK THE ANACHRONAUTS CAN HELP US THERE. THEY WERE SENT INTO THIS ZONE TO HUNT FOR RECRUITS LIKE THE BOY. THEY NEED A WAY OUT.

EACH ONE IS EQUIPPED WITH A TEMPORAL ACTIVATOR.

THE PRIESTS MADE SURE I WAS FULLY BRIEFED ON THIS HARDWARE. I CAN PROGRAM IT TO GET US CLEAR.

JULIA? I'LL NEED THE DATA-LOG TO SUPPLY THE CORRECT GEO-SPATIAL COORDINATES.

JULIA?

THE DATA-LOG, RIGHT?

THANKS.

JULIA... I...

SAVE IT FOR SOMEONE WHO'S LISTENING, MISTER.

I *REALLY* MISSED STUFF, DIDN'T I?

I'M AFRAID YOU DID. I'LL EXPLAIN LATER!

THE TEMPORTAL'S SET. JUST GIVE THE WORD, AND WE'LL BE BACK IN WORKS HQ.

THAT'S THE *THEORY*, ANYWAY.

WHAT ABOUT THE BOY?

WE MUST LEAVE HIM HERE. IF EVERYTHING WORKS OUT WE'LL COME BACK FOR HIM.

I *PROMISE*.

YOUR *PROMISES* DON'T FILL ME WITH CONFIDENCE JUST NOW, MOONRAKER.

JUST ACTIVATE THAT MACHINE AND GET US HOME...

SPEAKING OF WHICH...

...THE WORKS.

RACHEL?

RACHEL?

RACHEL! IT'S IRON MAN! WHERE ARE YOU, CHILD?

WELL, CYBERMANCER! ANY SIGN OF HER?

SHE'S HIDDEN HERSELF REMARKABLY WELL, I--

--WAIT! I'M REGISTERING AN ENERGY FLARE! IT'S COMING FROM THE CHAOS VAULT...

NO! NOT HIM! NOT NOW!

THERE'S THE SOURCE OF THE FLARE... JUST AS I GUESSED...

"...CENTURY!"

IRON MAN. GREETINGS TO YOU. I HAVE RETURNED FROM MY ODYSSEY...

...AND I AM PERPLEXED...

WHO IS YOUR COMPANION? WHERE ARE THE OTHERS? THIS PLACE IS COLD AND EMPTY... EVEN *PLATO* DOES NOT ANSWER.

MY COMPANION IS CALLED *CYBERMANCER*, CENTURY. WE'RE BOTH REALLY *HAPPY* TO SEE YOU, BUT--

THERE IS SOMETHING *WRONG*. WHAT AREN'T YOU TELLING ME?

OLD FRIEND, I'M TRULY GLAD YOU'RE BACK. THINGS HAVE TURNED WANDA AND THE OTHERS... EVEN THE *AVENGERS*... AGAINST ME.

THEY'RE TRYING TO *KILL* ME, CENTURY. I NEED HELP TO--

YOU NEED *HELP*, ALL RIGHT.

RHODES!
HEY THERE, PAL...
DON'T BELIEVE A WORD HE SAYS, CENTURY...
...TONY STARK IS MORE *DANGEROUS* THAN YOU CAN IMAGINE.
JIM! NOT YOU, TOO?!
YOU *SEE*, CENTURY? YOU SEE HOW THEY'VE ALL TURNED *AGAINST* ME?
TELL HIM, RACHEL! TELL HIM WHAT YOU TOLD ME. ABOUT *AMANDA*.
I HEARD HER ON THE COM-LINK, CENTURY...
NO! *NOOO!*

GAAH!

WAK KOOM

YOUR REPULSOR WAS *CHARGED!*

YOU WOULD HAVE *KILLED* THEM BOTH!

AAGH!

TZZOW

TEN OUT OF TEN FOR *INDIGNANT OUT-RAGE,* ALIEN!

NOW, SHUT UP AND *DIE!*

WHAKK

UGH!

BIG BLUE! YOU'VE GOT TO GET RACHEL OUT OF HERE ***NOW!*** GET HER TO SAFETY!

BUT--

DO IT! YOU'RE HER ONLY CHANCE TO SURVIVE!

TZZAK

BLAST IT, NO!

SHOOM

VERY WELL, JAMES RHODES.

STAND CLOSE BY ME, CHILD. MAKE NO SUDDEN MOVES.

'KAY.

YOU SHOULD HAVE GOT HIM TO TAKE YOU *TOO*, JIM.

YEAH?

EITHER THAT, OR YOU SHOULD *NEVER* HAVE COME HERE AT ALL.

I CAME BECAUSE OF OUR *YEARS* OF FRIENDSHIP, TONY. I CAME TO HELP.

IT'S NOT TOO LATE.

AND IF I DON'T *WANT* YOUR HELP?

THEN I'LL HAVE TO STOP YOU.

WITHOUT *ARMOR*? WITHOUT A HOPE IN *HELL*? DON'T MAKE ME *LAUGH*!

AND DON'T COUNT ON OUR *FRIENDSHIP* TO PROTECT YOU FROM ME.

FA FOOM

I WON'T.

NOW, HOW'S THIS GONNA GO?

NEXT: READ THE ACTION AS IT UNFOLDS IN **WAR MACHINE #22, AVENGERS #394 & IRON MAN #324** AS STARK AND RHODES CLASH FOR THE **FINAL** TIME! THEN GET BACK HERE FOR **SIEGE PERILOUS** AS FORCE WORKS FIGHTS FORCE WORKS!!!